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TAGS: [PTER](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [IZ](#) [JO](#)

SUBJECT: JORDANIAN CHARGE RETURNS TO BAGHDAD; MEDIA  
CHANGING THEIR TUNE ON THE "NOBLE IRAQI RESISTANCE"

REF: A. AMMAN 02382

[1](#)B. AMMAN 02297

[1](#)C. AMMAN 02218

[1](#)D. AMMAN 02131

Classified By: CDA David Hale for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

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SUMMARY  
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[1](#)1. (U) Jordan's charge d'affaires returned to Baghdad on March 24. The King has taken a conciliatory stand, emphasizing in a press interview Jordan's strong support for Iraq, highlighting Jordan's ongoing training of Iraqi security forces and its commitment to secure the Iraqi-Jordanian border. The local media are taking a more sober look at their past reporting on the so-called "noble resistance." Privately and in print, many seem chastened by the Iraqi reaction and critical of their own coverage of the violence in Iraq. End Summary.

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JORDANIANS WORKING TO COOL THE SITUATION  
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[1](#)2. (C) On the King's orders, Jordan's Charge d'Affaires Dimai Haddad returned to Baghdad via commercial air on March 24 and will conduct business out of a hotel in Baghdad until the security situation at Jordan's Baghdad embassy improves (refs). Meanwhile, having cut short his international travels to attend to domestic politics, including the clumsy GOJ response to the suicide bomber story, the King is determined to set the record straight on Jordanian-Iraqi relations. In meetings with official visitors and in public interviews, he has underscored Jordan's tangible support for Iraq over the last year, its commitment to fighting terrorism, and the priority it attaches to maintaining border security to catch would-be infiltrators into Iraq.

[1](#)3. (C) During a widely-publicized interview with al-Hayat on March 23, King Abdullah said that Jordan will maintain its strong counterterrorism stand, and that Jordanian-Iraqi ties remain close. "Jordan has the most secure borders with Iraq. We trained Iraqi police and army officers and provided the Iraqi government with everything it asked from us," Abdullah said. In private, Jordanian officials are quick to note their view that the majority of foreign fighters are entering Iraq from Syria and Iran, not Jordan. The GOJ points to its support of out-of-country voting for Iraqis in January (Amman served as headquarters for the 14-country operation), its push to encourage Sunni participation in the political process, its extensive training programs for Iraqi police and military personnel in Jordan, and its support for Iraq's economic reconstruction.

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BUT STILL ON THE DEFENSIVE  
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[1](#)4. (C) The visceral reaction of Iraqis to reports that a Jordanian family celebrated the so-called martyrdom of their Hilla bomber caught the GOJ -- and ordinary Jordanians -- off-guard, and put them on the defensive. Jordanians contend that even if Jordanian citizen Ra'ed al-Banna was proved responsible for the Hilla bombing -- and Jordanians claim this is not proven -- it does not mean that the GOJ, or ordinary Jordanians condone the act. During the al-Hayat interview, King Abdullah expressed surprise at the accusations that Jordan abetted the resistance in Iraq, saying, "they were baseless. I wondered about the reasons behind them and their timing. I still believe that the relations between the Jordanians and the Iraqis are much stronger than that, but they accusations were made at a time when we needed to stick together."

[1](#)5. (U) Meanwhile, during an interview with al-Jazeera satellite channel on March 25, Jordanian member of Parliament Mamdouh al-Abbadi rejected a demand from Iraqi Vice President Ibrahim al-Ja'fari (appearing on the same program) that Jordan issue an apology "proportional to the size of" the suicide bombing in Hilla and open an investigation. Claiming

that responsibility for the bombing has not been confirmed, Abbadi said: "I am surprised at the statement of brother Ibrahim al-Ja'fari, who is known for his moderation and wisdom. He knows that we do not apologize for something we have not done. He knows that we condemn all terrorist operations, especially against civilians, women and children, as happened in al-Hillah. He knows that. We are surprised at this escalation. We do not believe that Iraq needs an escalation with its neighbors, especially Jordan, which harbors every respect for the Iraqi people." He blamed the "escalation" on "persons with special agendas within the new Iraqi system," and said that Jordan would "never apologize for something we have not done."

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JORDANIANS' EMOTIONAL BAGGAGE COMPLICATE MATTERS  
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16. (C) Convinced that a hidden hand orchestrated the demonstrations at the Jordanian embassy in Baghdad (Iran and Ahmad Chalabi are most often named as culprits), press and popular emotions swung at first to reflexive nationalism but may now be cooling with the realization that Jordan needs pragmatic relations with the new Iraq. The al-Banna affair seems to have woken up the GOJ to the realization that it must work harder to communicate to its population the rationale for its support of the new government in Iraq, and make the case that decisions are in Jordan's best long-term interest. The GOJ may now understand -- a bit too late -- that its failure to counter ordinary Jordanians' opposition to the U.S. war in Iraq has contributed in great part to the Jordanian street's support for the "resistance" no matter the indications and constant flow of information that the "resistance" to occupation was actually targeting Iraqis, not the American "occupiers." Jordanians' widespread prejudice (and fear) of the Shi'a -- and of what Iran may be doing to manipulate the situation in Iraq -- is on many Jordanians' minds, from the King on down.

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JOURNALISTS CHANGE TACK ON "HEROIC IRAQI RESISTANCE"  
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17. (C) In the wake of the controversy over the alleged Jordanian suicide bomber, Jordanian editorialists and commentators are taking a more sober look at their uncritical reporting on the so-called "noble resistance" in Iraq. At a recent small gathering of Jordanian politicians, Uraib al-Rintawi, a Palestinian-origin columnist for the Arabic daily Ad-Dustour, said the Hilla story had exposed the glorification of suicide operations in Iraq by the Jordanian press since the fall of Baghdad. In recent private conversations, Rintawi and other journalists criticized the "knee-jerk praise" for young men who blow themselves up in Iraq in the name of Islam and the failure of Jordanian commentators to make it clear that it is Iraqi civilians and young security recruits who make up the great majority of the victims. This misguided Arab nationalism and hatred against the American occupation, according to Rintawi, has inspired fanaticism among Jordanian youth and enraged Iraqis, posing a grave danger to Jordan's national interests both domestically and vis-a-vis Iraq.

18. (U) In a rare instance of self-criticism, Jordanian commentators have written articles recently denouncing "resistance" martyrs and attacking their own coverage of the operations that target Iraqis. "Those who support such actions and describe them as heroic...are simply responding to primitive, sick and shameful instincts," wrote an Al-Ghad columnist. Other editorialists denounced the "misinterpretation of Jihad that deforms Islam and its noble meanings." Commentators have not, however, discussed their coverage of attacks on the U.S. "occupiers," which many Jordanians still consider legitimate "resistance."

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COMMENT  
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19. (C) Until the al-Banna affair, criticism of the "noble resistance" in the local media -- or in private conversations -- was almost unheard of. No doubt the new trend was partly inspired by GOJ statements denouncing the attacks against Iraqis as well as the outrage expressed by Iraqi leaders and ordinary citizens, if not outright pressure from the GOJ to put out the "right" message. The detention (and release) of the reporter who wrote about the al-Banna family's alleged celebration of their son's martyrdom no doubt also had a chilling effect. The sharp reaction from Iraq seems not only to have deflated the resistance-boosters, but also to have forced Jordanian commentators to admit that their distorted take on the violence, however gratifying it may be to the emotions of the street, is proving to be very much a double-edged sword for Jordan's interests at home and in the region. It also may have forced the GOJ to take a more active approach to defending its policy to a skeptical public.

19. (U) Minimize considered.

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